



Tracing Elusive Pre-1837 England Ancestry

Phillip Dunn, Sr British Research Consultant

England and Scotland AG®

FamilySearch.org

dunnpb@familysearch.org

After 1837 in England, there are numerous records and successful means by which to find ancestry and people, such as using a combination of Civil Registration, census and church records. Most vital events for most of England's population can be found. It is *prior* to 1837, commonly referred to as the "black hole" period, where this task quickly becomes complex and requires use of and research primarily in England's church and other records. This class outline will emphasize some critical "helps" for researching ancestry in records of this important era, more *effectively*.

WHAT YOU NEED TO GET STARTED

Some important points to know before you can get started in England pre-1837 era, are:

1. Learn in which parish your ancestor lived or resided, or was born.
2. Determine date or year of birth via age at marriage or burial of the ancestor, or census
3. Other identifying facts: parents' names (including maiden name), signature, names of siblings, birth order, spouse's name[s], year of emigration, names of neighbors, etc.
4. Learn the occupation

Home & Compiled Sources for Locating the English Place of Origin

The key to being successful in England research is identifying the parish where an ancestor lived or was born. Knowing an area, region or county can also be helpful, but the exact parish name will lead more swiftly to vital data. After home sources, when the place of origin in England still is not known, see <https://wiki.familysearch.org> and type "Handlist of Compiled Sources" for a list of databases to search. Seek death cert., naturalization, obituary, census, tombstone, military record, etc. See also <https://books.familysearch.org> for family histories.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO 'QUICK-FIND' PRE-1837 ENGLAND ANCESTRY?

Once the county of birth or last residence is (at least) known, you are ready to seek— **indexes**, as well as databases and transcriptions—which enhance the chance of success in the pre-1837 period. Here are some advantages of finding and using especially indexes:

- Allow you to quickly and thoroughly search a group of records for an area or parish
- Mitigate the need for novices to immediately learn to read old manuscript handwriting
- Reduce time spent searching parish by parish
- Allow you to quickly identify which parish registers need to be searched manually

Indexes or transcriptions must be diligently sought but used with the following cautions:

- They are secondary sources
- They contain mistakes, including omissions and misspellings
- They are always incomplete
- Data from indexes should **always** be checked against the original record for accuracy

BEST INDEXED RECORD SOURCES FOR RESEARCHING ENGLAND'S PRE-1837 TIME PERIOD

When and where available, the best indexed record sources of choice to search in pre-1837 England in order to construct family pedigrees are indexes to:

- Church records/Parish Registers – are considered primary record sources containing vital information for births (baptisms/christenings), marriages (banns and licenses) and deaths (burials). Most available indexes—online/published pertain to parish registers
- City or county directories: try Google, genuki, or FHLFavorites for “directories”
- Probate records – see www.fhlfavorites.com for numerous county-wide index link
- Occupational or Guild records – Boyd’s Citizens of London (see “Community Trees” at FamilySearch: see Genealogies pg); Google!, findmypast.co.uk; also see the Family History Library Catalog under the city name and “Occupations - Indexes”
- Chancery records (National Archives’ catalog): online indexes, available; see “C” series
- Military records - (at The National Archives/findmypast: some online; Canadian “C” series military recs. See pensions, post-1860 Muster books & paylists, officers’ rec.)
- Emigration/Immigration – Ancestry.co.uk; findmypast.co.uk, FamilySearch.org
- Electoral Registers/rolls – Ancestry.co.uk
- Civil registration of BMDs – see FreeBMD.org.uk

WHERE TO FIND: INDEXES, TRANSCRIPTIONS AND DATABASES OF ENGLAND RECORDS

Here is a list of places generally and of major websites with indexes and databases to parish registers (and other record sources) as follows:

- 1) County Record Offices – some, i.e. Middlesex (L.M.A.)
- 2) Many indexes or transcribed records may be found:
 - At Family History Societies (of the county) – see their available publications on sale
 - In private possession (for addresses see *Atlas & Index to Parish Registers, Phillimore & Co.*)
 - Online:
 - Google! – try these 3 search terms: “Index”, “Baptisms”, & then “[name of] locality”
 - www.genuki.org.uk – see under the name of county for availability
 - <http://www.fhlfavorites.info> – has a vast list of “Favorites” (under Country/County/Parish - at FHCs), under name of *County*; then *Church Records* (Note: many are deadlinks; Google to find new links)
 - <https://wiki.familysearch.org> - under county’s name has “Probate records” section complete with links to *numerous* indexes—for many counties; also has some FHL “Favorites” links (Wales currently and a few others)
- 3) The FamilySearch.org database[s] for England at www.familysearch.org is currently the single largest online resource for finding Church of England ancestral data available with 140+ million in its databases of mostly parish register extracts and other records. However, note that—
 - No county is *completely* indexed; Shropshire, Bedfordshire, Warwickshire come close

- 26 counties are 75% (or more) indexed; 11 counties with less—abt 65%, and abt 7 with 40% or less are: Middlesex, Northamptonshire, Rutland, Essex, Leicestershire, Norfolk, Somerset, Suffolk, Wiltshire
- 4) The Society of Genealogists Library, in London: (www.sog.org) has the largest collection of *transcribed* parish registers of nearly 12,000 of England's 13,800 parishes!
- 5) Ancestry.co.uk – images & indexes to several England counties—Lancashire, London, Yorks
- 6) Findmypast.co.uk has databases containing over 80 million names, including baptisms, marriages and burials (as well as a billion more from other records) from throughout the country
- 4) The Family History Library's England church records collections have many county-wide indexes and transcribed parish registers, mostly available on CDs, microfiche, books and some are on microfilm; probate records for all counties. View their catalog at--
http://www.familysearch.org/Eng/Library/FHLC/frameset_fhlc.asp
- 5) Search for websites to access online collections at all public/university libraries
- 6) Online Parish Clerk: Many transcribed parishes available for counties: Cornwall, Cumberland, Devon, Dorset, Essex, Hampshire, Kent, Lancashire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northumberland, Somerset, Sussex, Warwickshire, & Wiltshire. Google to find—under county name & "Online Parish Clerk"
- 7) Volunteers at <http://www.freereg.org.uk/> - 33 million names/entries from England parish registers. See especially for Norfolk and Somerset with nearly 80% coverages, respectively!
- 8) www.UKBMD.org.uk - a most significant gateway to many online county databases

THREE STEPS TO 'QUICK-FIND' ANCESTRY IN ENGLAND:

- 1) Create/use a Master List of Parishes you need to [re]search. The following maps and gazetteers (below) will help you compile a list all parishes comprising a county or a region of same—which should be used to help as you search in indexed parishes in the above online resources. Choose/use any one of the following resources:
 - a. <http://maps.familysearch.org/> - provides an online, free map showing parishes contiguous to your ancestor's place of birth or residence. Can print maps and parish lists!
 - b. <https://wiki.familysearch.org> – search & click the name of (target) parish; for chapelries, note the ancient parish it resides in, and click it. Then printout list of all attached chapels within ancient parish boundary.
 - c. <http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/expertsearch.jsp> - look up the parish or township name, parish by parish: Can form a list of parishes in the area of interest (1848); or, also try—Lewis' *A Topographical Dictionary of England* (see <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/topographical-dict/england>) (1870).
 - d. Parish Locator" at www.Genuki.org.uk (downloadable). Type in parish name to find a printable list of all parishes and churches up to a 25-mile+ radius
 - e. *Phillimore Atlas & Index of Parish Registers* - FHL Book #942 E7pa; at many archives, libraries; obtainable for about \$50-\$95.
- 2) Use one or more of the following resources to help you distinguish what parish's records are indexed and available to search online vs those which are not indexed:
 - a. Visit FamilySearch.org: click Catalog; then in the "[Place Search](#)" box, type the place; then click "**Church records – Indexes**". Note: Where catalog shows "Computer printout", it means that parish *is* indexed, and its data is online for searching--at FamilySearch.org. If you've searched for the ancestor in that parish and it didn't appear, then consider that parish "searched" and move on to the next parish on your master list of parishes to search (see 1 above).

- b. Archersoftware – is a website with an outstanding utility that interfaces with FamilySearch (see <http://www.archersoftware.co.uk/igi/fs-eng.htm>) providing a list of *most* [but not all!] parishes indexed by FamilySearch.org. It can be used to more efficiently help you search parish by parish within a county boundary by a glance of the eye. [Note: It provides only names of indexed parishes up to and as of 2-3 years ago. *Unlisted* parishes (on this website) means *they may not be indexed and infers you may have to [re]search in original parish registers and/or Bishop's transcripts.*]

Thus, one by one, you can check off each parish (using your above-mentioned "Parish List"), as you either search index online or, search in the original parish registers; and work parish by parish in this manner throughout whole counties if or as may be necessary—to locate a possible ancestor.

- c. Use FamilySearch's search-engine to find up to the moment which parishes are indexed: 1) type name of your ancestor's parish (correctly spelled!), and 2) click "Search". FamilySearch will provide you with parish/church and census records, etc., data for each parish—*if* indexed!! Then use filters, i.e. see "Collections", in left margin, and click "England Births & Baptisms 1538-1975" to filter by parish/church records
- d. Google: the following three search terms to find or locate indexes and databases published either online, or available in CD/Fiche/Booklet format. Merely use the following search terms, i.e.--- 1) [Name of] "Locality", 2) Name of] "Record" type, i.e. "baptisms" or "marriages", etc., 3) "Index"
- e. Use the list of "England County-wide Indexes" (see below); select and search as many available indexes for the county as possible.
- f. Findmypast.co.uk: see "About These Records" at bottom of each database page

- 3) Then search the original parish registers of those parishes which are *not indexed* (in the above-mentioned list of online sites to indexes of parishes—see step "2." just mentioned)
- 4) ****CAUTION:** Again, it's vital to note the geographic limitations of all indexes—especially county-wide ones that you search—to learn specifically which parishes were NOT covered in it! Then manually search those (few) *un-indexed* parish registers (on film at FamilySearch etc.).

Nonconformists: If you have *not* found your ancestor after searching in all parish registers, then use the above gazetteers to identify which nonconformist churches existed in an area, and search each register (indexes when available; the above steps also apply for these) and other record sources.

Search especially www.familysearch.org and www.bmdregister.co.uk (\$).